Chapter - I

Introduction

Edward Franklin Albee, a three time Pulitzer Prize winner, has been an acclaimed and, at the same time, the most controversial playwright of the United States of America. He is one of the few American dramatists to have achieved an international stature since the Second World War. Though he breaks into the limelight with an Off-Broadway entry, it was *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the play for which he is still best known, that gave him his first Broadway hit and propelled him into the front rank of American playwrights. Today, he is frequently listed alongside Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller as one of the nation’s greatest dramatists of the twentieth century.

Edward Albee rose to prominence as a major playwright in the 1960s. When he rose to prominence, the American theater was facing an unusual crisis. He was credited with the reinvention of the American Theater, which was in a serious and depleted state after the huge vacuum created by the sudden departures
of his most illustrious predecessors - O’Neill, Williams, and Miller. It can actually be nothing short of a great achievement by the product of Off-Broadway. For this feat, even the then President Clinton, while speaking at the Kennedy Center’s Honors Ceremony of 1996, lauded him by saying: "Tonight our nation - born in rebellion - pays tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American Theater was reborn" (As quoted in A Singular Journey, p.385).

American drama, when compared with the British drama, is relatively of a more recent origin. It can be called the child of the twentieth century. All the theatrical endeavors that took place in America until the close of the nineteenth century had been mostly derivative and imitative in nature. They can be described neither as purely American nor as pure dramatic literature. Moreover, the nineteenth century playwrights mechanically focused on either adapting or translating the works from their European counterparts. Though a Theater was set up way back in 1826, it provided no sufficient thrust to the development of indigenous talents. Only crude farces and propaganda
plays filled the stages and those plays were as good as footnotes in the history of American drama.

The Civil War and the most fortuitous isolation of America from World War I brought about dramatic changes in the fortunes of lives in the country. Growth, progress, buoyancy, and great optimism reverberated in all the nooks and corners. In resonance with the boundless energy that rejuvenated every other field, the American Theater too found, for the first time in American Theater history, an enterprising playwright who rightly seized the opportunity to burst upon the scene in 1916 with his twin productions *Bound East for Cardiff* and *Thirst*. The playwright is none other than Eugene O’Neill, who can genuinely be called the great founder of American drama. In O’Neill, there is a rare blend of the European realism and the American brand of romanticism. There is no wonder in believing that with Eugene O’Neill the American Theater tradition has actually started. Rana Nayar observed: “O’Neill did for American drama what the Bard (Shakespeare) had done for its English counterparts” (13). O’Neill is the leader of the first wave generation of American
dramatists. The other notable names belonging to the first wave include Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Maxwell Anderson, and Hellman. But these playwrights, though followed the path shown by O'Neill, find it difficult to sustain the energy generated by O'Neill. The periods of Depression and the post depression witnessed further downslide resulting in a serious crisis for the tradition of O'Neill.

But for the sincere efforts of both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, the tradition of O'Neill would have been incomplete. These two great dramatists of the second wave generation bring back American Theater on its feet again. They wrote most of their plays during the period of physical vulnerability in American history. Faced with the need to address the anxieties of their age, each of them responded in a manner characteristically of their own. Rana Nayar rightly comments that, “While Tennessee Williams, essentially a poet at heart, sought refuge in a fading vision of Southern aristocracy; Miller, being a socialist to the core, could only examine or critique
the myths which falsified the American principles of idealism or liberal humanism” (18).

These two playwrights strengthened the good work done by the leader of the first wave generation by firmly placing American drama in the annals of world drama. But, unfortunately in the late fifties of the twentieth century, the American drama found itself in a characteristic state of crisis. The death of O’Neill, the overwhelming personal problems of Williams, and the retreat of Miller from the public role resulted in a huge vacuum, leaving American Theater to desperately look for an original talent. At this juncture, Edward Albee arrived and more importantly proved to be a worthy successor to those three great cornerstones of Broadway in America.

Although Albee is credited with the rebirth of Broadway in America, much of the critical opinions have been really harsh on him. Each Albee play, since The Zoo Story, has served as a lightning rod attracting an extraordinary range of reactions and interpretations. Most of the critics praised Albee as future hope of American theater or condemned him as a mere charlatan.
Albee’s thematic preoccupations, presented in an absurdist shade, and his numerous bold experimentations on stage greatly influenced his viewers, reviewers and theater-critics to see him as an absurdist and even a defeatist artist. But behind the absurdist or the defeatist masks, one can discern in Albee genuine features concerning the well being of his fellow human beings.

Right from *The Zoo Story* in the late fifties of the twentieth century to *The Goat* of the early twenty-first century, Albee has been unique as a playwright. He carved out a niche for himself as the most important playwright of America alongside O’Neill, Miller, and Williams. Though he uses the social criticism of these well-known American playwrights, he is also greatly influenced by the European absurdist playwrights like Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and Arthur Adamov. His daring mix of the two trends has transformed him into one of the most rebellious and more importantly a potentially controversial playwright of his time.
Albee’s America, especially after the Great Depression and the World Wars, started disintegrating socially, though there had been a great boom economically, promising a golden future for all the Americans. The highly deceptive American optimism turned nightmarish in the lives of many in the society. As a result, human relationships received damaging cracks resulting in a growing gulf between man and his society. Also, the family tree got denuded of its traditional importance. The great American dream of a golden future, more importantly, the mad craving for material success, has inevitably contributed to the painful deterioration in the family as well as the social fabrics of the country.

Albee has responded to the agonizing maladies of his contemporary America with some stunning remedies through his dramatic art. Realizing that such deep-rooted tumors cannot be removed with soft therapies, he dares to be an avant-garde himself so that he can bombard the malignancy in the mind set of his fellow human beings. He has employed the European absurdist drug to subject his audience to some rare shock so as
to effectively cause awareness in them of what is actually wrong with them. Albee himself states in an interview that he has used his Theater to examine the contemporary American scene, attacking the substitution of artificial for real values and condemning the complacency and vacuity in his society. The absurdist perspective of Albee is but bitter pills prescribed to cure the ills of a decomposing generation. The existentialist views are but humanitarian medication administered to restore the dignity of his fellow human beings.

for human individuals or groups as to their health, welfare, rights and other existential living conditions" (www.angelfire.com/ca/.../Key00304.html.). The plays of Edward Albee are but clear manifestations of his considerations for his fellow human beings. He is a humanist to the core and the present study on his plays attempts to probe into the concerns that are the very foundations of his plays.

Before delving into the concerns of Albee, a concise mapping of Albee’s career is perhaps useful for a clear understanding of the playwright who stormed the theater world with a suicide murder (in The Zoo Story) and who is also the first playwright to provide a sympathetic treatment of bestiality on the stage (in The Goat or Who is Sylvia?). Edward Albee was born Edward Harvey on the twelfth of March, 1928, in Washington, D.C., and was adopted at the age of two weeks by the millionaire couple Mrs. and Mr. Reed Albee of Larchmont, New York. The adopted infant was renamed Edward Franklin Albee III. Though Albee, even at an early age, was well aware of the fact that he was an
adopted child, he reconciled to his lot, having made no real effort for any reunion with his birth-parents.

The Albees were rich as they were the proud owners of a chain of theaters, their family business, and the young Albee was lucky enough to have been associated with theaters and eminent theater personalities right from his early days. The exposure to theater developed in him a passion for the arts and the young Albee naturally fell in love with the realms of American Theater.

Albee, the child, was always surrounded with toys, tutors and servants making him a pampered child. C.W.E. Bigsby, in his account of Albee’s early life, calls young Albee as a spoilt rich boy. Toys, servants, St. Bernard dog to pull a sleigh in winter, and a Rolls Royce to go around the town can be the proud privilege of the rich but the absence of parental love and care will have its negative inflections on the young minds. Young Albee is a poor victim of this richness. His longing for a loving proximity with his adoptive parents has developed in him a sort of distaste for their expectations. They, especially his
adopted mother, have all along wanted him pursue a more conventional business or any successful professional career. However, Albee’s artistic disposition proves to be oxymoronic to their expectations. He often finds himself at odds with his adoptive family.

And, if his home pampers him, the early days in schools tampers with his artistic temperament. The fact that he was expelled from two of his schools and a college proves this point. Firstly, he was expelled from Lawrenceville, a boarding school in New Jersey and then from the Valley Forge Military Academy. He was expelled from these two private schools not because he is problematic and of poor discipline. He gave more importance to his romantic inclination to writing and ignored his academic work, resulting in his marching orders from those schools. In 1944, he entered the Choate School where he luckily found a favorable atmosphere, real breathing time, to hone his artistic skills. He began to write prolifically producing a large number of poems, short stories and even a play and a 538-page novel. After his fruitful stay at Choate school, Albee reached the Trinity College in
Hartford, Connecticut but was again out of the College midway through his sophomore year for his failure to attend maths lectures and chapel services, effectively ending his formal education.

Unable to cope with the expectations and after a petty row with his adoptive parents, he broke away when he was nearing twenty to live on his own; moved to Greenwich Village where he has spent the next decade, the highly formative years of his life as a playwright. Though he breaks away from his adoptive parents, he has never expressed anything ill of them. Of his family, the only person, whom Albee has great love for, is his Grandma Cotta, the mother of Mrs. Albee. He enjoyed good rapport with his Grandma who gifted him with a family inheritance of $250 a month, enabling him manage his fiscal needs to some extent. Nevertheless, the money did not prevent Albee from holding a variety of odd jobs to support his livelihood. He worked as an office boy for an advertising agency and as a salesman in the record department at Bloomingdales. He also worked in Gimbels' book department, as a barman in the Manhattan Towers Hotel, and, for three years, as a
Western Union Messenger. The experiences, gained from these jobs, provide him with ample materials for his future dramatic endeavors.

Actually, his literary efforts began rather early in his life. Though he has been greatly successful as a playwright, he has been not so lucky with the other genres. He began his literary enterprise as a poet, writing poems at will and producing them in large quantities during his life at Choate. Those poems were mostly banal but certainly threw enough light on young Albee’s talent. According to Bigsby, they “contain evidence of that optimism which emerges as an essential aspect of his later work” (4). His short stories too were dull and very remote from real life and so were his attempts at novel writing. While, in spite of his sincere, continuous, and prolific efforts, the other genres did not give Albee any windfall, only his plays pivoted him to the role of America’s foremost writer. Though he shot into fame with his Off-Broadway entry with the fatal confrontation between Jerry and Peter, his dramatic career was not sudden and dramatic. Stephen Bottoms divided Albee’s dramatic career roughly
into three periods – the early, the middle, and the late.

His early career was “characterized by a long apprenticeship of trial and error experimentation” (Bottoms p.2). He wrote a three-act farce called *Aliqueen*, when he was only twelve years of age. *Schism* was the next one written when he was of only eighteen years and the play was published in the Choate Literary Magazine in 1946. Of these two plays, only *Schism*, a truly naturalistic drama, is available today.

*Schism* is the story of a young man called Michael Joyce. Michael Joyce is completely disillusioned with the Catholic Church but falls in for a young Irish Catholic girl named Alice Monohan. Alice has not only reciprocated his love but has also accepted his ideas about the church and his cynicism. She readily agrees to run away with him and, in doing so, ignores her dying grandmother. While running away, they do not even feel guilty of deserting a dying old lady. Instead, they have consoled one another with the thought that they are not wrong because they run away only in search of happiness. Though melodramatic and
unimpressive, the play, nevertheless, attacks the attitude of the couple who preferred happiness at the expense of humane aspects. The need for compassion is the real thematic concern of *Schism*. A theme, so dear to Albee, figures prominently in almost all the later plays.

After *Schism*, Albee consumed almost a decade producing unsuccessful poetry. However, the dramatist in him breathed every now and then with some plays, most of them remained unproduced and unpublished. In 1949, he came out with a three-act drama of familial and sexual tensions called *The City of People*. This three act melodrama is about the life of one young Alan who attempts to make the opposite choice. By accepting the love of a woman called Anna, he tries only to escape the rarefied, the highly intellectual ivory-tower environment in which he has been raised by his教授ial father, and to face the daunting yet thrilling urban sprawl of the title - and in doing so, to replace the comfortingly abstract constructions of words and ideas with real experience. (*Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, p.2)
In 1951, Albee came out again with a play in three scenes called *Ye Watchers and Ye Lonely Ones*. This is a play about the struggles of four gay men. The gay theory finds place in almost all his plays. In 1953, following his meeting with Thornton Wilder, a well known theater personality, Albee got the much needed thrust to his thirst. Wilder encouraged him to try his hand at play writing. The advice strengthened his conviction of becoming a force to reckon with in the theater arena, resulting in the writing of *The Making of a Saint* and *The Invalid*. While the former depicts a group of passengers waiting at the station for the train of life, the latter presents the dilemma of a young man of twenty-four of making a choice between participating and not participating. However, it was only with the help of William Flanagan, a music composer and friend, his long cherished dream of becoming a playwright was finally and successfully materialized with the Off-Broadway launching of his first one-act play *The Zoo Story* in 1959 and 1960 in German and America respectively.
The suicide-murder in the Central Park literally stormed America and heralded, in no unclear term, the arrival of a new vibrant voice in the American Theater. Ironically, the manuscript of the play was read almost by all the producers in New York and was summarily rejected by all of them. It was only through his friend William Flanagan that Albee finally makes his debut as a playwright. The play got its first performance in Berlin as a part of the double bill with Beckett's *Krap's Last Tape* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, on 28 September 1959. The play however made its first American performance at the Provincetown Playhouse much later. Finally, Albee, the playwright, was born. Until the success of *The Zoo Story*, the Off-Broadway Theater in the 1950s was busy only reviving the kind of classic plays that were no longer viable commercially on Broadway. But, this new play by Albee, with its "compelling and controversial dialogue, and its affordably low budget 'two men and a park bench' minimalism, draws the attention of critics, producers, and the public alike to the regenerative potential of Off-Broadway as a launch-site for the new playwriting
voices" (Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee, p.3). Albee became the chief advocate and poster boy for this new movement, writing a string of further one-acts over the next couple of years.

The Zoo Story is about a loquacious drifter's confrontation with a middle aged conventional family man in a park called the Central Park in New York. Jerry, the drifter meets Peter, the family man, in a secluded corner of the park on a Sunday evening and tries his best to have some meaningful contact with him. Having failed in his attempts, Jerry provokes him into violence resulting in his own death. Though the basic situation is illogical, the play is hypnotic till the very end, till Jerry impales himself on a knife held by the bewildered Peter. The play ends with the death of Jerry. The need for compassion and the necessity for freedom from self-imposed isolation are the positives that Albee has tried to put across. The Zoo Story wins for Albee an instant reputation which he responds to with a series of one-act plays namely The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox, and The American Dream.
In *The Death of Bessie Smith*, Albee has dramatized America's simmering racial conflict into a conventional realist short play, dealing with the death of a popular Negro singer, Bessie Smith. The singer meets with an accident and could have been saved had the hospital authority, the White, attended on her on time. The apathetic attitude of the White leads to an untimely death of a promising Negro life. Racial indifference, a sensitive subject, is handled well by Albee by not showing the character of the Blues singer on the stage. She remains an off-stage character all through. This play instances the humanist tendency of Albee whose concerns are not limited to the welfare of the Whites alone.

A fourteen-minute sketch called *The Sandbox* is the shortest of Albee's plays. It is also the first of his plays to receive its premiere in America. Written for the Festival of Two Worlds held in Italy, the play received its first performance only in Jazz Gallery in New York in 1960. It is, in fact, a shorter version of *The American Dream*. When commissioned to write a short play for the festival, Albee extracted several
characters from *The American Dream* and readied this miniature version. The plot offers a shocking story of Grandma, the mother of Mommy. Considering Grandma as superfluous, Mommy and Daddy have forcefully dragged her to the beach, dumped her there in a sandbox and waited the whole night for her to die. Finding the poor old lady dead the next morning (Grandma is actually pretending as if she were dead), Mommy and Daddy have decided to put up a brave face to face the future in the face of such adversity. They have finally left for home, now free from the surplus. In the words of Gilbert Debusscher, "the essential purpose of this short play is to decry accepted ideas, stereotyped attitudes, convenient sentiments - in brief, the clichés of daily life and language" (30).

*The American Dream*, like its miniature version *The Sandbox*, is a scathing attack on his contemporary American Society where affections become mere affectations. The family tree has been a great symbol of American values. It is always associated with compassion and love. But the family tree becomes denuded of love, compassion, and humane aspects. Albee
has placed the concept of family at the center of action in this play to examine the vacuity in family life. Roudane opines that the "unfettered enthusiasm for wealth and security of the post-Eisenhower America forced him to rethink cultural values and assumptions; to assail what he saw as American complacency" (47).

After this absurdist satire, Albee is naturally due for a full length 'feast' for his audience. In between there comes another short play namely Fam and Yam. FAM (Famous American Man) and YAM (Young American Man) tells the story of a meeting between two unnamed playwrights. Yam goes to the apartment of Fam to interview him. He is very much impressed by the luxurious apartment. He praises Fam, and then tells him of an article he wants to write about the venality of Theater producers, the corruption of agents and managers, and the witlessness of audience.

The unprecedented success of these one act plays prepares the way for his first full length play called Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, a runaway success on the Broadway. A truly critical sensation, the play revolves around two unhappy married couples. The
action commences around two O’clock in the night at the residence of George and Martha, the elderly couple in the play. After a routine Saturday night party, they return home and are soon visited by Nick and Honey, the younger ones. The mutual destructive games of Martha and George and their habitual harangue lay bare the sterile family life they lead. This searing play on marital strife enshrines Albee in the pantheon of great playwrights. Preferring illusion to reality has become a way of life. When the excruciating realities bite hard, man takes shelter under the carpet comforts of illusion. Albee dismantles this myth of illusion to offers a solution to the two couples to return to reality to reorganize their life.

*Tiny Alice* (1964) is the next play. Of course, Albee has adapted a few works of other writers for the stage in between. Those adapted works, in the opinion of Albee, are but mere tools to sharpen his dramatic career. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1963) is adapted from the novella by Carson McCullers. *Malcolm* (1965) is the other work adapted from a novel by James Purdy. Since these adapted works are mere tools, they are
excluded from the purview of this study on Albee. Also excluded is *Everything in the Garden*, which is originally a play by Gile Cooper. Chronologically, *Tiny Alice* comes in between *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *Malcom*. The play is weak and a failure when compared with the great success of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?.* Nevertheless, for all its weaknesses, *Tiny Alice* demonstrates the playwright’s commitment to experimentation. Besides, the play also reveals his continuing fascination with the theme of reality and illusion.

It is about Julian, a lay brother, who is first seduced away from the church by a conspiracy hatched by Miss. Alice and her lawyer and is later shot at by the Lawyer. Miss. Alice is rich and wishes to leave a large sum of money to the church. Her lawyer meets a cardinal who sends Julian to the castle of Alice to seal the deal with her. Julian is forced to marry Alice and, when he refuses to accept their version of reality, is shot at. The play ends with the death of Julian. If the need to face the reality is at the core
of _Who’s is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,_ Tiny Alice attempts to define what that reality is.

The next important play from the Albee Theater is _A Delicate Balance_. The play is first produced at the Martin Beck Theater, New York, on 22 September 1966, in a staging directed by Alan Schneider. The play centres on Agnes and Tobias, a middle-aged suburban couple settled into an affluent but stultifying existence. The precarious balance of their accommodation to each other is upset by the arrival for extended stays of their daughter, Julia and their friends Harry and Edna, who are fleeing a vague dread of nothingness. The relationship of the domineering Agnes and the emasculated Tobias is further disrupted by the presence of Agnes’s alcoholic sister, Claire, who attempts to seduce Tobias but is rebuffed. In the course of the play, Agnes and Tobias come to an awareness of the emptiness of their life together, and both repudiate their habitual roles. Agnes refuses to be the decision-maker and Tobias rouses himself from his lethargy to take the decisive action of allowing Harry and Edna remain in the house, despite the objections of
Julia, who views them as intruders. The second couple, however, decline to stay, realizing that the house offers them no refuge from their feelings of fear and alienation. Though John Simon calls it a “posturing play,” (34) *A Delicate Balance* is intended to point out the fragile nature of that illusion of security by exploring the ill-defined boundaries which separate sanity from madness. The play has won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, the first of the three won by Edward Albee.

In 1967, *Everything in the Garden*, opened on Broadway at the Plymouth Theater, is Albee’s Americanization of Giles Cooper’s play. This play is a commissioned adaptation by Albee and bears little resemblance to Cooper’s original. The need for money is actually the subject matter of the play. The play is fast moving and relatively light, but it clearly points out how we are living in a money-driven society. Jenny is the wife of Richard. They live in the suburbs and are just managing to keep their head above the water. Often, they feel compelled to keep up with their neighbors. Jenny is an avid gardener, showing
greater interest in keeping a garden in her house. The play moves fast and towards the end poor Jenny is forced to become a call girl to meet the growing demands of money. Albee, even in an adaptation, has once again proved that he is a playwright with a purpose.

*Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* is another experimentation attempted by Albee. And, the next two plays, namely *All Over* and *Seascape*, are often known as Albee's companion plays. As Clive Barnes has observed, "if *Seascape* is a rose play, its earlier companion is a black play" (*Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, p.79). In *All Over*, the family, the doctor, and the best friend and lawyer of a wealthy and famous man gather at his deathbed. The play reflects the attitude of a society that focuses neither on death, nor on the dying, but on the way in which the potential mourners experience the process of dying.

With the companion play *Seascape*, Albee won his second Pulitzer Prize for drama. Albee himself directed this Broadway production, which opened on January 26, 1975, at the Shubert Theater. Like many of
Albee's plays, *Seascape* focuses on communication in interpersonal relationships, in this case between couples. Albee's first successful play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and his first Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *A Delicate Balance* are also about this topic. But *Seascape* is different from these dramas on several counts. The play is not strictly a drama but, according to various critics, has elements of comedy, fantasy, satire, and absurdity. In *Seascape*, Nancy and Charlie, an American couple, on the verge of the major life change of retirement, are having problems in their relationship. They are discussing these matters on the beach when another couple appears, two human-sized lizards named Leslie and Sarah who speak and act like people. The lizard couple has evolved to such a degree that they no longer feel at home in the sea and are compelled to seek life on the land. What the lizards experience with Nancy and Charlie nearly drive them back to the sea, but with an offer of help from the human couple, they decide to stay. This relatively happy ending is not common in many of Albee's previous plays, and critics find it refreshing.
While *All Over* concentrates on the situation of waiting, revealing the Wife's attachment to the dying man only in the last moment, *The Lady from Dubuque* is an intense treatment of the experience of a loving survivor. The play presents the final moments of Jo, who is dying of what apparently is cancer. She spends her final evening of her life in the company of her husband Sam and a group of friends who engage in an evening of parlor games. Like *All Over*, *The Lady from Dubuque* explores the meanings and effects that a dying character has on those surrounding her. Yet, unlike the earlier play, the focal character in this play on mortality is not hidden behind a hospital screen to expire out of sight, but is kept in the midst of things. She dies throughout the play, a little bit at a time, painfully, bitterly, sarcastically, and, finally, gently.

*The Man Who Had Three Arms* is a play in the form of a lecture (or, perhaps more accurately, a lecture parading as a play). Commissioned by the New World Festival and premiered at the Players State Theater in Miami during the June of 1982, this Albee play is a
meditation on celebrity in America. The central character called Himself has a third arm from the middle of his back, which gave him instant notoriety, put him on the covers of the most popular weeklies, and made him the talk of the nation. But such fame proved transitory. Now that the extra appendage has receded, the man who had once been lionized for his difference as well as exploited for his freakishness is left pretty well drained, his personal life ruined and his usefulness on the circuit at an end. This is a two-act play with three actors. The play takes place in a Theater where Himself is about to speak to the assembled group about his life of celebrity as “The Man Who Had Three Arms.” The two other characters are called The Man and The Woman. These two characters play different roles, first as the people who are introducing Himself to the audience and then as the Father and Wife of Himself and finally as the Manager of the celebrity. In the first act of the play, Himself appears on the stage and talks about his transformation from a successful family man to a person who is horrified to discover that a third arm is
growi
[528x745]ng from between his shoulders. In the next act, Himself describes being on the celebrity circuit and all that entails, while he grows more and more in debt. His wife leaves him. He falls apart in front of the audience only to deal with a final surprise. The excess of the culture of celebrity lies at the core of this drama.

The next Pulitzer winning play, *Three Tall Women*, is intentionally an autobiographical play. The protagonist of the play, a compelling woman of more than ninety years old, reflects on her life with a mixture of shame, pleasure, regret, and satisfaction. She recalls the fun of her childhood and her marriage, when she had an overwhelming optimism for her future. Yet she bitterly recalls the negative events that resulted in regret: her husband’s extramarital affairs, the death of her husband, and the estrangement of her gay son. The play consists of two acts in two different styles. In Act I of the play, there are three characters and they are simply called A, B, and C -- an elderly woman (A) interacts with her middle-aged caregiver (B) and a young woman (C) -- who have been
sent from her lawyer’s office to clear up some financial problems, problems that have arisen because of her failing memory and her refusal to relinquish control of the affairs to anyone because of her mistrust and fear of being cheated. The first act ends with A having a stroke. Albee’s experimentation finds a full-fledged expression in the second act of the play. Albee places a dummy in the bed to represent A in the present stage of her life, and transforms the characters appeared in the first act as representations of A at different stages of her life.

In 1998, Albee’s next play *The Play About the Baby* was premiered first in England and later on in America in 2000. The early years of the present century did also see two more plays by Albee namely *Finding the Sun* and *Marriage Play*. But Albee returned to his rebellious best once again in 2002 when he shocked everyone with his highly sympathetic presentation of bestiality on the stage with what can be his latest torpedo called *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?*

Albee’s version of the emotional ties within a family and the behavior of Ross, Martin’s best friend,
suggest a bleak outlook for a society that reverts to primal instincts when threatened. *The Goat* returns to the theme of the problems within a marriage that were brutally explored in Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It makes the gender warfare between the warring couples in the earlier play seem like a mere game.

Martin, the epitome of a good man, successful in every sense of the word, has ventured somehow into a place where the morals he has lived by do not matter, and he does not seem to understand why he should care. His "things happen" philosophy bespeaks a moral indifference, and, in his view, he just cannot be held accountable for his feelings or his actions in regard to Sylvia, the goat. This passion beyond reason that Martin feels for Sylvia calls into question many aspects of the life that he has been living, undermining its authenticity and creating the never-answered question of what propelled him into this carnal compensation in the first place. Acceptance of this paradox is beyond the purview of any wife, the play suggests, and, despite Martin's previously good
track record as a husband and provider, the marriage is irrevocably destroyed.

In all, Albee has written -- including the produced and unproduced, published and unpublished, original and those adopted -- forty plays in a career spanning (and still continuing) nearly six decades. His plays have aroused controversy from the very beginning of his career as a dramatist. He is "one of the most controversial playwrights of our time" (Critical Essays on Edward Albee, p.1). Criticism on Albee has poured out in an avalanche unequal to that devoted to other contemporary writers. The volume of such criticism is clearly indicative of the attention drawn by and importance given to this major American playwright.

The ever growing corpus of Albee criticism has conveniently been divided into two groups - the naysayers and the yeasayers. Acceptance in the highly orthodox world of Broadway will not come to anyone that easily. Even the Off-Broadway success of Albee (who can rightly be termed the king of Off-Broadway) finds only negative reception with the Theater critics. The
early reviews of his plays clearly suggest that he has miles to go before finding a more favorable response to his plays. He himself contributed to the controversy by responding through the numerous interviews he gave till date, to the virulent bitter attacks on his works. He has been recognized for all the negatives, even though his works have many positives.

"Ever since Jerry fatally impaled himself on the knife in *The Zoo Story*, Mommy and Daddy, recounted their spiritual dismemberment of their child in *The American Dream*, and George and Martha verbally assaulted each other in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Edward Albee has been recognized for his focus on confrontation and death" (*Understanding Edward Albee*, p.6). Albee, thanks to Martin Esslin's inclusion of his name in his (Esslin's) book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, has been labeled an absurdist, nihilist, pessimistic writer. Gilbert Debusscher dismisses that "Albee's works contain no positive philosophical or social message. His theater belongs to the pessimistic, defeatist or nihilistic current which characterizes the entire contemporary theatrical
scene...” (Tradition and Renewal, p.82). Debusscher’s pronouncement characterizes much of the critical attitude regarding Albee’s achievement. The numerous reviews of his early plays mostly commented on his preoccupation with either dying or death. The naysayers expressed their reservations over Albee’s choice of themes.

Amacher in his book *Edward Albee* writes about Albee’s career and provides part biography, part script analysis, and part career assessment. Amacher is best at discussing Albee’s “place in the theatre” and his well-made play form with the formless Theater of the Absurd. Contending with the remarks of Amacher, Bigsby, in his book *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, presented several interpretations of the symbolic aspects of Albee’s plays, usually, but not always, in single-play discussions.

Gussow Mel’s *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey* is a comprehensive bio-critical study of the playwright. Written with Albee’s cooperation and input, Gussow discusses all Albee’s plays in the context of Albee’s life and his beliefs as an artist. McCarthy’s book
Edward Albee is somewhat stronger than other studies on Albee’s theater sense, as opposed to his plays as dramatic literature, this brief but highly informative overview puts the work in a dynamic, action-and-reaction-oriented structural perspective.

Roudané’s Understanding Edward Albee is a very fine book where he provides a fresh perspective on an important American dramatist, and whether or not one accepts Roudané’s carefully developed argument one must at least reconsider the negative readings that have set the tenor for work on Albee. In his concluding chapter Roudané once again quotes Albee, who says that drama is an attempt to make things better. He sees Albee’s work as “equipment for living towards better life” (231). This study ultimately informs the readers that the plays of Albee embody an affirmative vision of human experience, and Roudané counters Albee’s reputation as a nihilistic dramatist.

Providing comprehensive details of each of the plays and major characters, Dircks, in his work Edward Albee: A Literary Companion, covers the canon of Edward Albee. He analyses all the works of Albee, cross
referencing with important themes. Other merits of this informative book include biographical information focusing on Albee’s artistic beliefs, his understanding of the playwright’s responsibility, the importance of music in drama, and the technical craft of writing plays.

Robert Brustein in his article, “Fragments from a Cultural Explosion” argues that Albee’s talent as a playwright is underdeveloped and his plays lack depth, focus, and direction. He feels that his plays, mainly The Zoo Story, The American Dream and The Death of Bessie Smith “embody a vital defect: the absence of any compelling theme, commitment, or sense of life which might pull them into focus” (29). In another article, “Albee and the Medusa Head,” he observes: “Albee is a highly accomplished stage magician, but he fails to convince us there is nothing up his sleeve. His thematic content is incompatible with his theatrical content - hi-jinks and high seriousness fail to fuse” (30).

Another critic namely Harold Clurman finds faults with Albee’s characterization. He even declares,
“There is hardly any plot” in his plays. While one group of critics slings charges against Albee, another group is busy branding him as an absurdist. It all starts with Martin Esslin who placed Albee among the European absurdist playwrights.

While the works on Albee are divided in their perceptions of the plays of Albee, there seems to be a sort of consensus among most of them that his plays are intended to bring about not simple awareness but definite changes in the lives of the people of his society. Based on my reading and understanding of the plays by and the works on Albee and also the research works carried out on various aspects of the plays of Albee, I arrived at a conclusion that Albee is basically a humanist. It is Ronald Hayman who has actually been the first to place this controversial playwright in the humanitarian perspective without offering any details. Roudané, in his landmark work has made it quite clear that Albee’s plays are highly affirmative in their outlook, while Rana Nayar declares Albee as a humanist.
Besides the endless endeavors of the critics, the academics have also carried out researches on various aspects of the theatrical exploits of Albee. The early research works are mostly on the absurdist shades of his plays. Albee has been examined in the light of the possible influence of playwrights like Adamov, Ionesco, and Beckett on him. Albee’s main contribution to American Theater is his pulsating dialogues, his effective handling of the language. Studies have been carried out on his verbal pyrotechnics. The themes of death and dying, illusion and reality, the role played by silence in his plays are also explored by the academics.

However, there has not been even a single attempt, to the best of my knowledge, made on the humanitarian concerns of his plays. Albee is a social critic. He has used his plays to critically examine the various problems afflicting his society. He wants to conjure up sort of teaching emotions that his audience may experience while and after watching his plays. Indeed, Albee endeavors to educate his Theater-goers with an intention to make them better human
beings. Albee is indeed a humanist, rather a critical humanist. He is highly critical of the faults and fallacies of his society. However, unlike others, he does not stop with mere criticism. He attempts to find out ways for his characters so as to help them come out of their illusionary world to rebuild their lives. Albee has been repeatedly reminding his audience or readers about his commitment to a purposeful art. As his own creative urge being vested in the “dissatisfaction with the way things are,” (Wasserman, p. 13) he wants his art as a “social kind of instruction,” (Wasserman, p. 11) having a “teaching and liberating” (Wasserman, p. 13) effect on the audience.

Taking a clue from Rana Nayar who calls Albee a humanist, and who has worked on the various forms of relationships existing in the plays of Albee, I, as a researcher, attempt to make an analysis of the plays of Albee to probe into the humanitarian concerns with which he writes his plays. In the process, this study enumerates all the humanistic concerns enshrined and exhibited in his plays.
The present thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one, entitled "Introduction," presents the biographical account of the playwright and a chronological account of his plays right from his formative days. It also attempts to place Albee's contribution in the rich history of American drama. Following the customs of thesis writing, the introductory part does also include a detailed survey of all available literature on the works of Albee both by the critics and scholars. The early critics and play reviews find Albee as a defeatist and nihilist playwright. When Martin Esslin opens the flood gate with his absurdist labeling of Albee, the circle of the critics starts revolving around his absurdist traits. Slowly better sense prevailed to see the most controversial writer of the twentieth century in the right perspective - that his plays are affirmative and life-giving. Finding a clue first from Ronald Hayman and then from Rana Nayar, about the humanitarian attributes of the playwright, the present research is undertaken to study the humanitarian concerns of the playwright enshrined in his plays.
Chapter Two is titled, “The Withered Leaves.” This chapter is devoted to an analysis of the unfortunate individuals who suffered owing to the flawed strictures of the society. The character of Jerry is the first individual, whose loquacious desperations and the ultimate suicide murder in the Central Park where he meets Peter, the other character in the play *The Zoo Story*, is analyzed. The analysis of the life and death of Jerry is indicative of the highly indifferent attitude of the society. The need for love and compassion are the positives that Albee tries to put across through the character of Jerry.

The next character that comes up for analysis is that of Grandma in *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream*. Her daughter, Mommy, fails to take care of the aged Grandma, resulting in her death. The necessity for elderly care is what the playwright wants to stress on. Next individual, who is indeed a victim of the great expectations of the consumerist culture in the post war America, is Martha, the loud-mouthed “devil with language” in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Finally, the second chapter dwells on the premature death of the
blues singer, Bessie Smith who died partly as a result of the racist culture highly prevalent in the Southern states of America.

The third chapter entitled “The Denuded Trees” brings to light Albee’s genuine concerns over the disintegration of the American traditional family. Family is a basic social unit with specific functions for the society. Tattered by the mad drive after wealth as the only means of success and happiness, the concept of family has lost its meaning and importance in the society. Albee has been preoccupied with this concern for family and its sanctity right from his early one act plays to his twenty first century shocker viz. The Goat or Who is Sylvia?. This chapter also endeavors to probe the familial strife exposed by Albee in his plays.

Though it is a foregone conclusion that Albee is a morbid social critic, the penultimate chapter tries to reaffirm the societal concerns of Albee who has used his theater and art to shock his audience in order to help them cast away the evil strictures of his highly ambitious affluent society. This chapter is named “The
Sterile Garden” which is marred by its artificiality and complacency. Albee’s reexamination of the values of the society is the prime concerns of this chapter. The picture he creates of the lives of his generation is analyzed with reference to his plays.

The concluding chapter sums up the details of the previous chapters and, following traditions, makes suggestions for future research possibilities in the plays of this living legend of American drama.